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Vol 71 No 08 • 24 APRIL 2010

POWER TO THE PEOPLE?

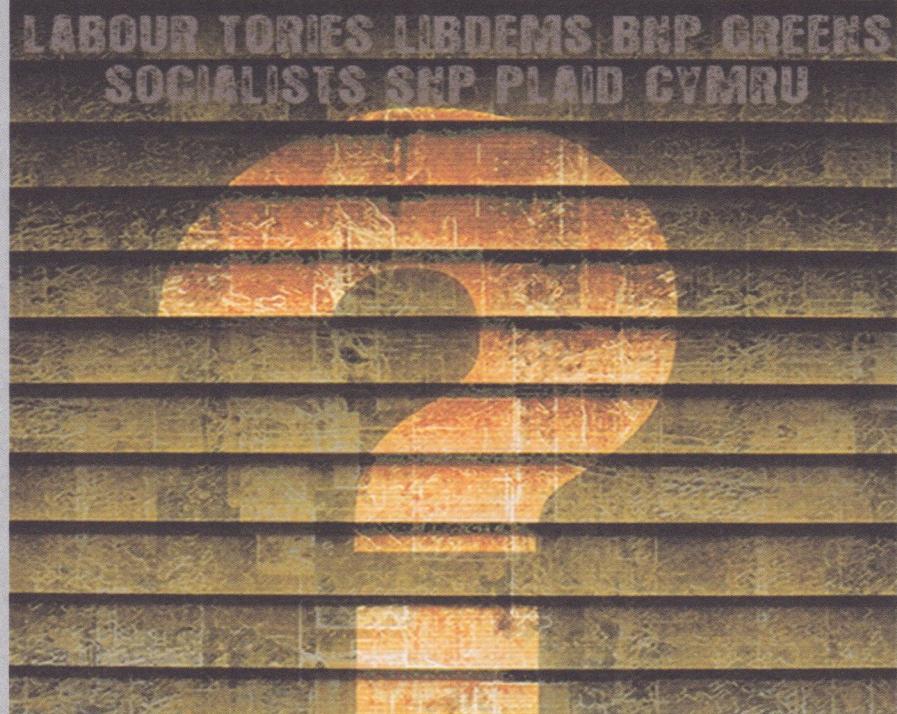
The 2010 general election promises to be a fight between the future ideologies of capitalism

For the past month or so people in the UK have been exposed to intensive media saturation on behalf of the three major mainstream political parties (and the shock troops of the smaller parties), bombarded with imagery, soundbites, and paper-thin election paraphernalia from the professional leaders of the political class all vying for our attention, our approval, our consent, for the ultimate prize of running the country, on our behalf, for the next five years.

Every daily newspaper and television news item, every gossip column, radio interview and poster campaign is there to sell us the idea that the 2010 general election is important, more so than any other in recent history. The idea of voting suddenly becomes a duty, a necessity, a compulsion in a world where opinion polls dominate, percentage points rule and social commentators obsess over every personal detail.

And yet as ordinary people we continue to struggle in our day to day lives – for a decent page 2 ►►

LENS CAP THE DECAYING POLITICS OF CAPITALISM



According to statistics 17 million people eligible to vote at the last election, didn't. That's almost as many people who actually voted for the Tories and Labour combined.

EDUCATING WHO ABOUT WHAT

Despite the threat of massive job cuts across the whole of education the latest official figures show the income of UK universities has risen by over £2bn in the last academic year largely due to the increase in tuition fees.

The statistics, published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, includes all 165 publicly funded Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The total income of HEIs rose by 8.3% between 2007/08 and 2008/09 from £23.4bn to £25.4bn, the biggest percentage increase coming from tuition fees, at a staggering 16.2%, with the lowest increase coming from public funding at 3.9%.

Government funding bodies still provide the biggest source of income at £8.8bn followed closely by tuition fees and education contracts contributing £7.3bn. The rest came from private

research grants and contracts, consultancies, supply of goods and investment – HE institutions received £938m from contracted research on behalf of external partners. There was also a massive drop of almost 32% in endowment and investment income.

Total expenditure of all universities also increased from £22bn to £24bn, up 9.0%, with staffing costs rising 7.9% to £14bn. Interestingly the highest increase in expenditure by over a third was through interest payable on premises, residences and catering operations, including conferences.

What isn't revealed is that vice-chancellors, the universities chief executives, saw their pay and benefits boosted by 10.6% last year, and now receive packages, excluding pensions, worth on average £219,156.

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ISSN 0016-0504



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NEWS

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

Welcome to the election special of *Freedom*. *Freedom* was founded in 1886 as a journal of Anarchist Socialism and continues to put out the message that people should take control of their own lives from politicians and share the fruits of their labour without being exploited by business, bosses and bankers. We see ourselves as part of a wider international movement to environmentally sustainable global community based on freedom and co-operation.

We are based in Angel Alley in London's Whitechapel and also have a wide ranging bookshop with the offices of many friendly radical groups (Corporatewatch, Advisory Service for Squatters and London Coalition Against Poverty) above us. We have frequent book launches, talks and events as well as a meeting room for a diverse range of people who share our hopes.

In this little column we update people about the little events in our drab lives to let you know what's going on, usually the fuses blew and we spent a day in the dark or how far progress on the new washbasin has gone. All things that require people to know what's going on more quickly than can be done by a fortnightly journal get put on the website (see below). Here though is a good place to thank all the people who've helped out on this issue—but out of modesty do not wish to be exposed to media spotlight.

Dean Talent and Andy Meinke (editors)

SUBSCRIPTIONS

To find out if your subscription is due for renewal, look at the number above your name on the address label. This issue is vol 71, no 08, so if that number is 7108 or less, then your subscription is now due. See page 16 for a renewal form or you can renew via our website. If you have any queries or want to ask for a standing order form, email subs@freedompress.org.uk.

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 8th May 2010 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 29th April. You can send your articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to 'The Editors', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

LENS CAP COVERED IN A CLOUD OF CODSWALLOP



An enormous eruption of election ejectus has unexpectedly burst out over Britain and brought disruption and chaos to the country. All common sense has been grounded until further notice and the politicians have settled back in Westminster, or better still been blown out to sea by a mighty wind.

Power to the people?

◀ page 1

wage, and a decent home, to find work, to pay the bills, to buy food, all beneath the economic stormclouds of an escalating national debt, bank-bailouts and City bonus culture, MPs expenses, public sector cuts and a spiralling recession that allows the health service to be pushed further into private hands along with our free education system and social housing stock as warring factions present their ideologies wrapped in the consumer-friendly jargon of political manifestos we are left, as always, out in the cold.

The disenchantment with the electoral process and the expectation of a hung parliament are symptoms, not of voter apathy, but of the acknowledgement that the illusion of 'people power' and a 'fairer Britain' can never truly outweigh our mistrust of those who wish to lead us. A *Times*/Populus poll late on in the campaign showed that 32% of the population hope no single party wins a majority on 6th May. Even the political class are beginning to recognise the problem.

"This is a phoney war right now, but that's not because of any lack of fighting," one senior Tory ruefully commented. "It's because they think we're all fakes."

But even with the criticisms surrounding this election, genuine social issues are never confronted head on. Capitalism still maintains its default position, left untouched and out of sight with the occasional nod at share prices to gauge the feeling of the financial institutions. What is never acknowledged is the problems we continue to face as a class society are borne, and thrive, under the very system that all political parties want to be in charge of. And the state retains its legitimacy, regardless of which party achieves the majority in the House of Commons, through dominating the social discourse.

It is our job then as anarchists to be part of the landscape that openly challenges that discourse. That is why we continue to fight and struggle, not for equal representation, but for the opportunity to take direct control over our own lives.

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General Election Special 2010

Never mind the ballots...

Turn on the television, open a newspaper or browse the internet and be confronted with the fact that people have lost faith in politics and politicians. Across the board our political representatives have been shown to be corrupt and deceitful, and their policies are out of step with public feeling.

So, what can be done about the state of 'politics' today?

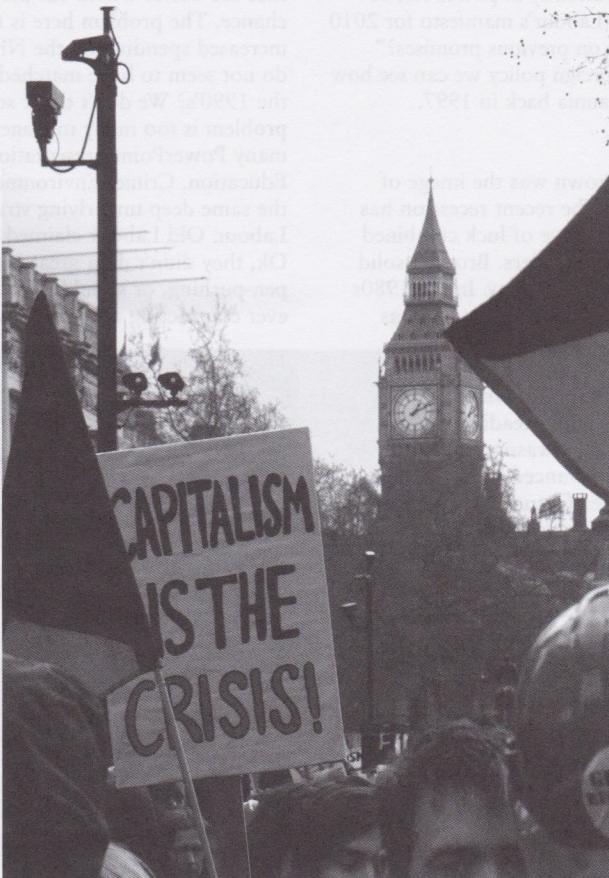
The politicians, civil servants, think tanks and newspaper moguls want us to believe that public discontent can be satisfied with a simple 'change of the guard', or with reform of House of Commons rules. But what happens after the election?

Whether the outcome is a landslide victory, a hung parliament, or something in between, the result for us will be cuts and attacks on our standards of living as the next government tries to deal with the ongoing financial crisis. A crisis for which all politicians should accept responsibility.

With the economic outlook remaining bleak there is also hope that in the tough years to come people will come together to defend themselves and their livelihoods against politicians and big business.

In this paper we critically address all of the manifesto promises. We are not partisan and hold no interest in supporting one party over another. The 'big three' – Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat – receive the most coverage (as you would expect). But we also cast our critical eye over the 'minor leaguers' – from the 'hopeful' Greens, to the crypto-fascists of the BNP... you will find them all here.

We are not sponsored by any party. We



And how would we manage without them?

This paper seeks to address these questions by offering up practical examples where communities have come together over the past years to solve the problems they were facing without relying on political experts. We can't make any promises and we don't have all the 'answers'. But then again, party politics don't have them either.

We challenge you to take the steps towards taking control over your own life,

Politics is really about human relationships, whether you complain to your workmates about the latest tax rates or moan to your mates about the local council's latest schemes or cuts in public services

are not out to deceive you, or push any party line. We will let their own bad records speak for themselves. If the following contains facts you don't believe, go ahead and search out the party manifestos for yourself, go beyond the newspaper headlines and party leader soundbites, and search out the truth. Make up your own mind if any of these groups truly represent your interests.

Experience has taught us that whoever wins power, nothing will change. As the old saying goes.... 'if voting changed anything, they would make it illegal'.

So can we rid ourselves of party politics?

and offer support to anyone tempted to try it. Is there anything left to lose? Politics may seem irrelevant. The narrow choices we are given only support this view. Ticking a box next to a candidate's name every few years might lead us to think that politics is something done by 'them' and not us.

Politics is about human relationships, whether you complain to your workmates about the latest tax rates or moan to your mates about the local council's latest schemes or cuts in public services, we are all engaged in some way or another. We want people to recognise that this sort of 'democracy', face to face, day to day

exploitation and prejudice, including but not exclusive to - economic exploitation (when a boss gets rich from your work), racism, sexism, homophobia and disability discrimination.

If you like these ideas, or wish to explore them further, there is a list of contacts inside which will put you in touch with anarchists near you.

But, as we stated earlier, we are not here to peddle you a party line. Take the ideas that best suit you and if the desire takes you, run with them. If not, treat this paper as a glimmer of truth in a month guaranteed to be full of lies.

Labour: thirteen wasted years

That was the slogan used by Harold Wilson in 1964 to describe the previous Conservative administration. More than the other parties, the one currently in power can be judged on its record. Before coming to Labour's manifesto for 2010 we can justly ask "how have they done on previous promises?" Focusing on the economy, health and foreign policy we can see how Labour lived up to the era of Cool Britannia back in 1997.

"End to boom or bust"

For a long time Gordon "Prudence" Brown was the image of trustworthiness at the economy's tiller. The recent recession has shown that he was in fact riding a long wave of luck combined with a desperate desire to please business leaders. Brown's solid grasp of economics led him to ignore the economy. In the 1980s Thatcher decimated Britain's manufacturing industry but was saved from economic meltdown by North Sea oil and growth in the "financial sector". Turning his back on the critiques he himself had at that time, Brown as Chancellor allowed deregulation in the banks leading to the current financial mess. Obviously he wasn't alone: to greater and lesser degrees all advanced economies did, but Britain, with a bigger financial industry, got harder hit. That's because it's not an industry. Banking does not make anything like manufacturing or do useful work like teaching: it is a glorified betting shop taking a rake off of the money gambled without offering people the occasional pleasure of seeing three-legged Dobbin come romping home in the National.

"Ethical foreign policy".

Today with a new Prime Minister the fact that Tony Blair lied to take Britain to war in Iraq is not a pressing issue. The unwinnable war in Afghanistan continues but again the Government is under limited pressure because no other major party proposes immediate withdrawal. Many people are tired of the chattering classes whining about Iraq.

At the heart of the Labour failure in foreign policy is the fact that most Labour politicians are not very interested in foreign affairs and party activists even less so. This applies double to defence or to use the old fashioned term- war. Again, New Labour were traumatised by the fear of the Falklands Factor that helped Thatcher win in 1982 and the accusation of making Britain defenceless by opposing nuclear weapons. The military and their cronies in the arms trade have found them easier to bamboozle than the Tories who at least played with Airfix kits as kids and wouldn't be dim enough to buy a fighter plane and save money by not putting any bullets in its gun as happened with the flashy new obsolete Typhoon.



newLabour newBritain

"The first stage of Fascism should more properly be called Corporatism because it is the merger of State and corporate power." - Benito Mussolini

The health service

This is Labour's strongest card as almost everyone rightly suspects that the Tories would cut the NHS to the bone given half a chance. The problem here is that while Labour has greatly increased spending on the NHS, the improvements in the system do not seem to have matched the outlay. Are nurses lazier than in the 1990's? We don't think so. Most people recognise that the problem is too many managers making too many targets on too many PowerPoint presentations. We could go on to look at Education, Crime, Environment and so on but we would only find the same deep underlying structural problems which are New Labour. Old Labour claimed to represent the "Working Class". Ok, they didn't do a great job but New Labour fully represents a pen-pushing, or should that be a mouse-pushing class which an ever contracting number of workers will have to support. The



Brown and Thatch: they like each other really

Tories, bankers and even the Pharaohs of old knew that it takes a lot of hard working toilers to support one rich lazybones; New Labour can't grasp that the society they want is not just unjust but unsustainable.

Fool me once, shame on you...

We were thinking of doing a humorous article on the Labour Manifesto but having read it we were reminded that satire died when Obama got the Nobel Peace Prize (didn't that use to be Kissinger?). You can amuse yourself at leisure as it is free online, complete with Maoist-style cover but for those who have something better to do we can summarise. Cutting through Gordon's forward "I love Britain and want the very best for our country." (even the BNP want that) and a lot of extra waffle we find in the last chapter '50 steps to a future fair for all'. Now we all know that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step but even a journey of a mere fifty steps could do better than start with Toddlers Tax Credit.

Overall it is a Tinkerer's manifesto from a worn out old Tinker's party that has long since peddled away its best wares. Some of the items on display however are frankly dangerous. "Intervene earlier to prevent crime, with no-nonsense action to tackle the problems caused by 50,000 dysfunctional families." Smacks of eugenics. Perhaps the "Control immigration through our Australian-style points-based system" is about emigration and the 50,000 families are to be shipped off to Botany Bay.

Left-wingers are often accused of being unrealistic but we'd be hard pressed to beat "Reform the UN, International Financial Institutions, the G8 and G20, and NATO to adapt to the new global challenges."

Finally Labour offer one thing that no one could possibly argue against, "Access to psychological therapy for those who need it." If they win this General Election, we'll all need it.

Tories: a vote for better riots?

Behold your new elected dictator, Dave Cameron. Some are hoping for a hung Parliament, a few wing nuts on the left think Labour might win the election, but Cameron's going to win it, and I think he will be a good prime minister.

To be a good prime minister you need to be a good figure of hate. And he's an old school figure of class hate, he's rich, he's related to the Queen and he's a member of the Bullingdon Club.

He rose to power through an 'amazing speech' at the Tory conference in 2005. Since then he's been representing himself as a man of common sense, trying to appeal to the middling classes with tales of a Broken Britain.

The Tory party loved him to start with. Since 1997 all they had were a load of boring baldies in charge of the party, but Cameron was new, a Tory version of Tony Blair... just seven years too late. The right of the party was worried, maybe he was too liberal and not cold-hearted enough to lead them. But as Labour began to catch up in the polls they have kept quiet.

The Conservatives have had a few ideas we would all agree on, like scrapping plans for identity cards, and they run campaigns like 'save the British pub'. There are also a few policies that will send shivers down the spines of activists, like the criminalisation of trespass, which would lead to the end of the squatting movement.

Michael Cain helped advertise their idea of national service for school-leavers, except a new national service where you work for free for the third sector instead of like the old days when they gave you a gun and packed you off to Egypt.

They're going to cut public spending by freezing public sector pay, cutting the cost of Whitehall, capping public sector pensions and then review the state pension age.

Their draft manifesto had these ideas:

Tax

It's classic Conservative style: they want to freeze council tax for two years, abolish tax on new jobs, cut the main rate of corporation tax. And the best is the removal of inheritance tax for all but the wealthiest (this will leave Dave's wife with a larger sum in her bank)... So low tax for the rich.

Health

They say they "can't go on with an NHS that puts targets before patients", so their big idea is to get rid of targets. So far so brilliant. They also want to improve cancer and stroke survival rates.

More of a wish then a policy... and isn't that like raising the survival rate target? And does this mean that Labour's trying to decrease survival rates of cancer? They also want to speed up the rate of privatisation in the NHS by 'opening up' to new sectors.

Education

What slogan could beat Blair's 'Education, Education, Education'? How about 'We want to make opportunity more equal'? It's not exactly a rallying call is it?

They're going to achieve equal opportunity in education by reforming the national curriculum, setting up a load of technical academies, and bringing in reading tests for six-year-olds. These school classes will be ruled with an iron fist with it being easier for teachers to use reasonable force to combat violence in the classroom. Bash the kids!

Europe

A sticky issue. Europe nearly destroyed the Conservatives under John Major, but they have managed to sort out a few nice and mental policies mainly about winning back powers from them filthy Europeans and something about taking our pound from our cold dead fingers.

The main fixation is a full opt-out from the Charter of Fundamental Rights (that should get the police vote).

Environment

Cameron is defiantly a green; he rides a bike, and he's got solar panels on his house. That seems to be their whole green manifesto - well they want to transform electricity networks and expand offshore wind and marine power while trying to make public transport greener.

Transport

They're going to improve our railways by building a high-speed rail link connecting London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds with 'the continent'. Environmentalists will be happy with their plans to block a third runway at Heathrow Airport, but they will be really angry if Cameron supports Mayor Boris's airport on water idea.

Defence

Soldiers are not respected (another sign of Broken Britain) so they will double the operational bonus for troops serving in Afghanistan and provide a service that will track and monitor veterans' mental health after they leave the armed forces, to try



Thatch and Cam: funny the way she keeps cropping up...

and stop battle-scarred troops shooting their families. Maybe taking troops out of Afghanistan would be a better way of helping them – but no, they just need better guns. Cameron's crew seems all uppity about the EU being involved in our defence; instead they prefer the cold war relic of NATO, and replacing Trident with some better nukes. Cameron is also keen on upholding our own values abroad, so watch out Islam!

Big Society

The most interesting part of the Tory plan is the 'Big Society', meant to mend Broken Britain by creating a 'neighbourhood army' of 5,000 professional community organisers that will give communities the help they need to work together and tackle their problems. These will be dumped into poor areas to help them 'heal themselves' with the hope that residents will take on the responsibility of their own community. This means funding cuts. Government shouldn't have to pay to keep your community centres open: you, the great unwashed, should do it yourselves... and here's a load of third-sector liberals to empower you to do the work for free. Basically, they've got nothing: cut taxes for the rich, tell the EU to get lost and cut public spending. But that doesn't matter, the key to Tory victory is showing everyone that they're not Labour. After the posters of Cameron's face were covered in graffiti, their main campaigns are harking back to 1980s Tory posters or showing pictures of Gordon Brown with messages like 'twat' printed next to him. They will be in charge soon, but as one comrade told me: 'Well, at least you always have better riots under the Tories'.

Gawain Williams

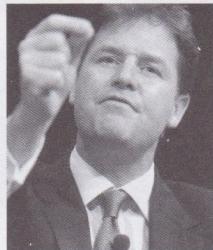
Lib Dems: ghost in the machine

The Liberal Democrats are trying to present themselves as the 'deficit truth-tellers' of this election. Some see them as the third choice after rejecting New Labour and the Tories on their appalling track records. The Lib Dems claim to be the only party committed to taking big money out of politics. They want to devolve power to communities, yet they support war in Afghanistan and want a strong national border force. They even claim to be able to ensure the BBC is independent from governmental and commercial pressure! Let's see how they look on closer inspection.

Economy

In their manifesto the Lib Dems claim they will introduce fairer taxes, paid for by closing loopholes that benefit the wealthy and polluters. But only about £1bn of the £17bn cost (6%) goes toward the stated aim of lifting low-income households out of tax. They want to regulate the banking system to prevent irresponsible lending and business practices, yet they also want less regulation for firms so they can thrive. They aim to set up a UK infrastructure bank (UKIB) that will attract private investment, for example, for the transport system, and be independent from the government: making decisions about funding according to its financial potential. The Lib Dems are notorious for their relatively right-wing economics; again in their election proposals their support of business shines through. They do not criticise big business in general, even though they claim to want money to have less of an effect on the running of the country.

Lib Dems want equality for women, disabled people and ethnic minorities, but most of this relates to getting them to work more



Work & unemployment

The Liberals want a 'fair and balanced economy' with 'jobs that last' in every part of the country and in every sector. They don't say much about benefits but have an overly optimistic view that everyone can have a stable job, which assumes that there can be enough jobs for everyone in our current economic set-up. They propose that every firm undergoes fair pay checks to address the inequalities of women's and men's pay: is this likely in practice? They will ensure no one pays income tax on their first £10,000. They want equality for women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and older people, but most of this relates to getting them to work more rather than addressing inequalities.

Housing

They claim that they will bring 250,000 empty homes back into use by giving the guilty owners a grant or a cheap loan – more money for property owners! They will build new homes, initiate a major insulation programme and make repossession an absolute last resort. They will give locals a say over the number of second homes in their area and much more control over planning applications and 'developments'. They would scrap Council Tax and replace it with a fairer local tax, based on people's ability to pay. Doesn't sound too bad, but they don't say anything about the balance of social and private housing or about affordable housing.

Health

The Lib Dems aim to protect NHS frontline services such as cancer treatment. They want to put local people in charge in elected health boards so they have a say over local hospitals and

can hold the NHS to account. They also want to improve GP services. This all sounds promising, but they don't say anything about the influence of pharmaceuticals or about general health issues apart from introducing a minimum price for alcohol. Nice!

Education

The Lib Dems would scrap the current prescriptive 600-page national curriculum and replace it with a 20-page 'minimum curriculum guarantee', which would let each school decide on the best curriculum for its pupils. They would cut class sizes but say nothing about improving working conditions for teachers, such as higher wages. They would scrap tuition fees and have a six-year plan to gradually do this. However, this should happen straight away. It also seems likely that they would do this by encouraging corporate investment in universities. They don't reject private/public schools.

Law & order

They aim to scrap ID cards, remove innocent people from the criminal DNA database, restore the right to protest and freedom of speech and stop unnecessary state intervention in people's lives, including the regulation of CCTV. This would mean more money for 3,000 more police, who would conduct more stop-and-searches and would be more accountable to locals. More police is assumed to somehow solve our crime problems. However, they do propose annual fitness tests for police officers, with those failing being demoted to a desk or civilian role, so you never know! They are generous in offering to cut the maximum pre-charge detention to 14 days! They want to reduce numbers inside in prisons, but have no strategy. They want inmates to work to make money for the people they have harmed. There would also be a new offence of 'drug dealing' – I assume that means yet more people in prison?

Immigration

The Lib Dems would take control of the UK borders by re-introducing entry and exit checks and establishing a strong, coordinated national border force with the power to arrest. This is in line with their pro-Europe stance, as this could be coordinated across the EU. They would end asylum-seekers' dependence on benefits by allowing them to work and allow people who have been in Britain for ten years, speak English and have a clean record to earn citizenship. They would introduce a regional points-based system to ensure migrants go where they are needed economically. This would mean less choice for people and also does not take into account those who have been here for a substantial amount of time, but not quite ten years. More fundamentally, it is based on the flawed idea of the 'right to citizenship', whereby the UK economy is the dominant issue and if migrants are suitable to contribute to this they can remain. Lib Dems aim to end the deportation of homosexual asylum seekers, but what about all the other reasons why people get deported? They do not discuss the state of detention centres and asylum housing. Overall, their proposals relating to asylum and immigration contradict their stance on general civil liberties.

Environment

The Liberals do not support a like-for-like Trident replacement and oppose dirty coal, yet they are keen to build new power stations and do not propose anything viable. They oppose airport expansion serving the south east and would introduce a per-plane tax, however they do not rule out all airport expansion. They would cut rail fares, improve local bus services and set up a national infrastructure bank to invest in public transport to encourage people not to take domestic flights. They say they want to reduce pollution, invest in green technologies and insulation, stop landfill and encourage recycling. They claim commitment to supporting 'developing nations' through an international leap-frog fund to jump dirty high carbon development by transferring renewable and low carbon technology to those countries that need it most. Not too bad, yet they hardly discuss international politics. So this last proposal seems very unlikely to take off in a way that favours communities over business.

BNP: Red, white and blue?

The latest figures show the British National Party (BNP) is to contest over 350 seats at this general election, the largest number of candidates fielded in the party's history. It is an impressive feat for such a small party, and one that obviously took a considerable degree of effort financing and co-coordinating. Disappointingly, they don't seem to have made plans to publish a manifesto for the occasion. Maybe they feel candidates don't need a coherent set of policies to present to the electorate? Or perhaps they don't consider potential BNP voters need to know what it is they are being asked to vote for?

Promising the moon

It's hard to say precisely what the BNP are promising, as at the time of going to press they have still yet to publish their manifesto. However, it's fair to say that they're promising the moon, as long as you're white. Their ability to deliver will leave something to be desired. Under 'first past the post' they'll struggle to retain deposits – it's important to remember that if the system hadn't been changed for the Euro elections [Griffin and Brons [party leader and Yorkshire MEP respectively] may not be polishing a chair in the European Parliament with their backsides. However in two or three constituencies at least they are likely to poll strong votes, with the hope that weaker performances will be offset by new members and even new groups emerging in those constituencies.

Although many people deride the BNP as a one-trick anti-immigration ship-'em-back party, that's very far from the truth. Their 2005 Westminster manifesto laid out a wide range of policies, which we can expect to see reprised this year. On crime, for example, their support for the re-introduction of hard labour

A 'Clause 28' style proscription against the promotion of racial integration would be introduced

for petty offenders and vandals and capital punishment for paedophiles, terrorists and murderers seems unlikely to be dropped: even though the first one would be reminiscent of punishment in the developing countries they decry and the second would mean leaving both the EU and the Council of Europe.

Many of their policies, though – for example, cutting 100,000 NHS bureaucrats and replacing them with doctors and nurses, or restoring the link between pensions and wage rises – wouldn't look out of place in many socialist party manifestos.

Leaving the EU is central to the BNP's plans. They say, probably rightly, that unless the UK leaves Europe 'virtually nothing' can be achieved. From asylum to housing, their plans could well do without the hindrance, not just of 'diktats' from Brussels, but also the barrier of the European Court of Human Rights. Once this



Blood and soil: behind the guise of nostalgia for a Britain that never existed the BNP remains committed to installing a fascist regime

hurdle's cleared, the BNP path would be much easier to follow. In the absence of the 2010 manifesto, the 2005 provides some examples of where they would go.

Obstacles like the Race Relations Act would be repealed. A pan-British parliament, based in the Isle of Man, would be responsible for economic and foreign policy, with other matters devolved to national parliaments, including a new one for England. The citizenry would be armed, as in Switzerland. BNP policies are a curious mixture of what you would expect, such as on the Race Relations Act, some policies many people would agree with, and some utterly loony nonsense.

It's when you turn to what would happen to immigrants and people from ethnic minorities that the means by which the BNP would realise their project becomes clear. Every support mechanism sponsored by the state would disappear. Laws against racial discrimination would be repealed. A 'Clause 28' style proscription against the promotion of racial integration would be introduced.

Harsh measures

Immigration from everywhere except north America, northern and western Europe and Australasia would cease immediately. A series of increasingly harsh measures would be applied to illegal immigrants. This hinges on whether what most people understand as an illegal immigrant is the definition a BNP government would use; it is likely that it would expand towards meaning 'anyone who isn't white and Anglo-Saxon or related'.

The BNP aims for a Britain that never really existed. Careful scrutiny of the 2005 manifesto shows the party aiming for a 'blood and soil' reading of 'traditional culture' – but it's a culture that would be unrecognisable. There's nothing of Britain's great literary culture there, instead the contrary aim to teach imperial history while withdrawing from the world. They would create a society in which people unable to prove on demand that they are British citizens would face possible deportation without their possessions.

The BNP are fascists, rather than national socialists. But it is worth bearing in mind one lesson from Germany. There was much that was socialist about the NSDAP's [Nazi Party] 20 Point Programme, drawn up in the 1920s. These were all discarded after 1933. The BNP's new constitution retains the desire to recreate the ethnic make-up of the UK as it was in 1948, and the apparent aspiration to bring the Republic of Ireland back within the British fold. (People in Ireland may have something to say about that!) It is these constitutional objectives which show where the BNP would take the UK. Behind the mask of chivalry it remains committed to installing a fascist regime.

Paul Stott and Neal Lennon



Other parties join the BNP in playing the racism card

Anti: manifesto

The issues behind the election promises

Parliamentary democracy is based on the illusion our needs and our concerns will be being represented by those we elect. In reality MPs in power only seek to represent their parties and their own personal interests. Look at how the war in Iraq became a reality (still costing us millions of pounds a day and the lives of ordinary young people) on the whim of our political elite. The purpose of government is to reinforce the status quo, keeping society subdued and capitalism ticking over, making profits for the rich while the rest of us are forced to accept what's left. Below we look at the real issues and the failure of governments to address them.

Economy

Whichever party is first-past-the-post and whatever balance of MPs makes up the next parliament, the relationship between government, corporations and banks will remain the same. Over the last few decades the divide between rich and poor has become even starker, even more polarised. Today over four million children in Britain are living below the poverty line - more than in any other European country.

The government won't intervene when whole factories and industries close yet can find £850 billion to bail-out massive financial institutions and increase the total national debt to an unprecedented £2.2 trillion, which will still have to be paid for by us working harder for less rewards.

Work and Unemployment

Despite paying lip service none of the parties can offer or guarantee overall job security for the working population,

simply because in doing so would contradict all their other election promises - "spending less" means in real terms job cuts and wage freezes. In fact the money they promise to free up to pay for their pledges and pay off the national debt comes as a direct assault on the working class, either through increases in direct or indirect taxation or limits on public spending.

Any promise of jobs is based on inducing new capital investment which is dependent on corporate tax breaks (paid

for by us) and lowering the wages as incentives. Work is visualised in terms of how we must adapt to the current climate of capitalism. The reality is governments are entrusted with the task of ensuring the economy continues to grow on behalf of the rich and powerful at the expense of the rest of us.

Unemployment remains another useful tool with which to drive down wages and

Today over 4 million children in Britain are living below the poverty line - more than in any other European country

threaten the existing workforce. Any active defence of jobs, wages or work conditions in the form of strikes is immediately attacked by the government in power. Unemployment only becomes an issue in as much as it is a drain on the Chancellor's financial resources.

Housing

The housing situation is in severe crisis, and one that governments have steadfastly refused to address over the years, relying instead on a mish-mash of inadequate legislation, the private sector and a shift in management as a means of dealing with the problem.

The shortage of affordable housing has increased exponentially since the late 1970s when local authorities were actively discouraged from replenishing aging housing stock. Added to this, Thatcher's policy of the right-to-buy on council property has left the social housing stock dangerously depleted. Indeed this has been a deliberate policy with previous administrations resulting in house prices being kept artificially high, only affordable to the rich, or those households prepared to take on massive personal debt.

It also means the low paid, poor and vulnerable only have access to what's left - overcrowded, substandard and often hazardous property.

Over 85,000 households were officially recognised as newly homeless in England in 2008, but Crisis estimate there are as many as 400,000 hidden homeless in the UK. Currently there are around 450,000 properties lying empty whilst housing waiting lists grow longer.

Health

The National Health Service was introduced in 1948 as part of the post-war reconstruction of sweeping social reforms, and seen as a success of the labour welfare state. That everyone should have access to medical treatment regardless of the ability to pay, and that free universal healthcare is regarded as



London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP) in Hackney

right rather than a privilege are not only noble sentiments, but worth fighting for and preserving.

Despite this, the NHS is seen as a burden by political parties in power. It is the country's biggest employer with over 1.3 million staff with expenditure last year of £98.3bn. Lessening the burden means instituting massive cuts and farming out more and more of the service to the private sector.

Today's NHS is planned around meeting statistical targets, rather than meeting the needs of patients (there has been a 5.6% annual increase in managers in the past ten years alone), and is being structured in a way to make it more profitable for private companies to take over. Foundation hospital trusts are now run as private business concerns where people's health is viewed as a commodity.

It is essential any free universal healthcare policy is run by those directly involved in providing service for the benefit of the whole of society. No political party is prepared to make that commitment; indeed successive governments have ensured the opposite.

Education

The UK system is based on compulsory education for all 5-16 year olds (schools being either state-funded or privately financed, and paid for, independent schools) as part of a standardised curriculum and an optional higher

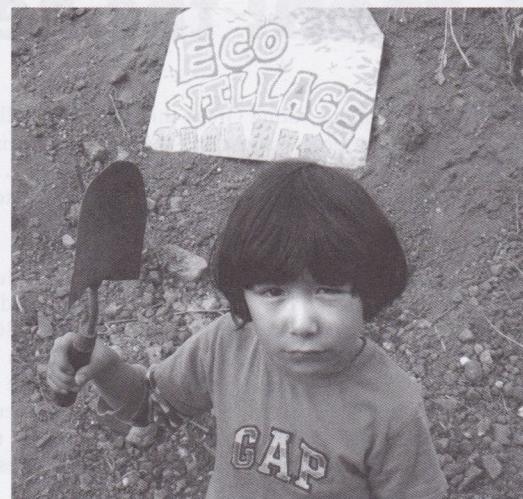
transformation in the education system must come through the collective needs of society and be free, open and inclusive to all.

Environment

It's clear that climate change, alongside other crucial ecological issues, is one of the biggest concerns of our generation. The only way it can be successfully challenged is if we confront the capitalist mode of production as a whole. The rabid exploitation of natural resources has been the backbone of capitalist expansion for the last 50 years - production is based solely on the desire for profit rather than to fulfill any social need.

State solutions to the climate crisis were presented to us 10 years ago through the Kyoto protocol - what were they? To privatise the air we breathe and turn carbon emissions into commodities, to buy and sell atmospheric poison, to create a new market of trading in the means of ecological destruction. It's no wonder many reject state solutions to climate change.

The question is, who and under what conditions, controls decision-making, and has climate-changing power? How do we bring about a transformation which empowers us all? Grassroots organising in co-operative, low-impact, sustainable ways, and practiced daily by millions, is



Kew eco village

What is clear is that we have more CCTV cameras watching us (over 4.2million in the UK - more than any other country per head of population), more laws introduced against the ordinary citizen (New Labour has invented over 3,600 new criminal offences since 1997), and more opportunities for the police to snoop into our private lives with a national DNA database and the introduction of biometric ID cards that can track our every move.

There is genuine fear of crime in society, which is manipulated by media

More than a manifesto

education in the form of universities which are maintained through state financing, though increasingly now topped up by student tuition fees.

Traditionally lower education was seen as equipping young people, especially those from less privileged backgrounds, for the necessary requirements of work - basic numeracy and literacy, vocational skills, time management etc, whereas higher education was for developing 'life skills' as well as securing academic qualifications as a pathway to better and more fulfilling employment.

Today however education is now being re-structured through the lens of 'the global economy' which means traditional skills-based learning is being replaced by the demands of the market with an increasing reliance on service industry provision.

The education system is now being 'corporatised' to fit that purpose, as seen with the introduction of academy schools, or universities being forced to adopt a commercial business model (many of which have former CEOs of private companies on their boards) to secure basic funding.

Education should not be seen as a process of providing a future compliant workforce, but as an integral part of the very social fabric of our society. Any

one way towards this.

Changing our sources of energy without changing our sources of economic and political power will not make a difference. Neither coal nor nuclear are the "solution", only complete social revolution.

Law and Order

Everyone has the right to live in a safe and secure environment free from the fear of violence and criminality. The question is: how do we successfully achieve this?

The law today and the institutions used to uphold it - the courts, the police, prisons, are all part of the state apparatus and as such anything that reinforces the power of the law reinforces the power of the state. Promising stronger, more severe policing powers without tackling the root causes of criminality - the massive social inequality that exists in this society - turns governments into repressive regimes.

With such an unequal distribution of wealth within our society, especially when the majority of that wealth comes from exploiting the rest of us, laws are first and foremost designed to protect the property and livelihoods of the rich and powerful, while maintaining order amongst the 'unruly' working class.

and used to divide communities so that we mistrust our neighbours and it is even harder to maintain strong community ties.

Immigration

Immigration is a controversial subject with strong opinions and feelings surrounding the issue. The idea of 'No Borders' where people are free to move across the globe without being criminalised or persecuted because of their identity maybe seen as utopian but the premise is essentially sound.

Borders aren't natural, they are created, often violently through wars, as a means of controlling populations, imposing laws that bind ordinary people to a set of social conditions we have no real stake in or means of challenging - they simply reinforce the authority of the state. It is no coincidence that the rise of the nation state and the rise of capitalism developed in parallel.

In fact, capital is free to move around the world, usually from poor to rich countries, unhindered by the same regulation. It is capitalism that causes scarcity and limits resources, not people.

What is beyond refute is immigration is used as a tool to divide us and keeping us fighting amongst ourselves.

Green: the new grey

Thinking about voting Green this election? Well, why not? They seem progressive don't they, with all their talk about social and ecological justice. Well think again. On closer look the Greens seem as grey and drab as their counterparts...

Economy

The Green Party proposes a 'green new deal' as a solution to the economic crises, inspired by the 'New Deal' proposed by President Roosevelt during the economic depression of the 1930s. By shoring up banks, investing in infrastructural growth and welfare to work programmes, Roosevelt was able to save the economy that had created the crisis in the first place. The Greens also propose investment in sustainable industries, welfare to work/green re-training and 'railing' in the worst excesses of the banking system.

While this looks good on paper, what it will mean in practice is the layoff of the remaining workers in traditional 'dirty industries' such as coal, and an expansion of unemployment disguised as 'retraining'. This means armies of the unemployed engaged in 'green/community' work – a retrogressive step to the dignity of unemployed workers.

They also seek to tighten up on 'tax collection'. What this would mean to the self-employed or those receiving working tax credit remains unclear.

Housing

The Greens propose a massive expansion of social housing (possibly on Brown Belt land) as well as introducing a 'right to

rent'. They propose an investment of £3 billion to fund the purchase by local authorities of homes threatened by repossession, which would then be rented back to the occupiers.

While this may allow some of 20-40,000 families threatened with repossession to stay in their homes, the money they have paid in previous mortgage repayments will not be re-inbursed and will only strengthen the profits of the 'big banks'.

Health

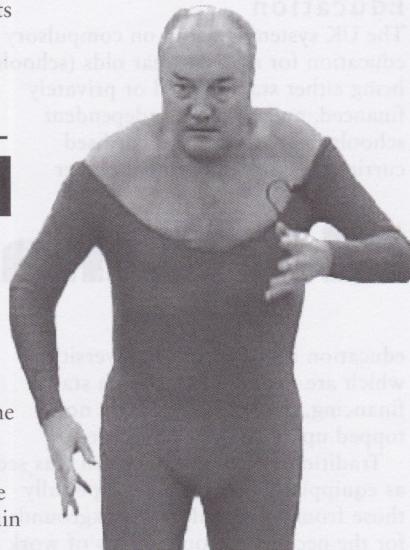
On health the Greens appear quite weak. They seem keen to push a 'preventative health care' line; this seems likely to manifest itself in yet more of the nanny state nagging regarding your 'five-a-day' of fruit and veg, consuming only organic produce and reducing smoking and alcohol consumption to ensure the survival of the health service.

There is little commitment to expanding desperately needed services. There is also no talk of defending NHS jobs or benefits offered to the workforce in order to maintain our domestic 'frontline' workers.

Education

Based on a look at the Green Party's EU manifesto in 2009, it has no plans for education at all, beyond the promise of insulating all schools.

So in the Green New World we'll have lots of warm students and teachers then...



Respect's George Galloway: heading up the unrepentant rump

Lefties: same old same old

Divided and squabbling, the depleted forces of Britain's left-wing political fringe face the 2010 general election in downbeat and fractious mood. Beneath the now-traditional 'unity' banners numerous rival leftist parties, alliances and coalitions will clash in a scrabble for meagre votes at the ballot box.

The largest left slate will be put forward by the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which will field around 40 candidates. The TUSC draws together the cadre of the Socialist Party (SP) and Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and some of the less-depressed remnants of the abortive No2EU alliance that stood candidates (to dismal and acrimonious effect) in the last European parliamentary elections.

Only a few years ago any kind of alliance between bitter long-term competitors the SP and the SWP would have been all but unthinkable. But the sharp contraction in membership that both parties have experienced, accelerated by a series of damaging splits and faction fights, has pushed the former rivals into reluctant and distrustful co-operation.

Flotsam

Behind the predictable rhetoric, the TUSC is the latest attempt to pull together what remains of the flotsam of the British left into some sort of credible electoral force in a shared nostalgia for 'Old Labour' politics. Recent unsuccessful gambits like this have included the Socialist Alliance and Respect, but the efforts of the TUSC drags things to a new organisational low.

The failure of the Respect project caused serious ructions at the highest levels of the SWP. The fallout led to the breakaway of a minority current, led by long-serving party figures John Rees and Lindsey German, who both resent being made scapegoats for the SWP's disappointment (and who resigned before their opponents in the party leadership could expel them for their alleged misdemeanours).

The TUSC may present itself as a left unity initiative that has learned the painful lessons of its predecessors, but its comradely embrace is highly selective: it has turned down approaches from

many would-be recruits; and failed to win the allegiance of several groups on its target list. The rump of the Respect coalition (controlled by the ever unrepentant George Galloway) has refused to come on board, as has the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and its allies at the Morning Star – both of these groups will stand a handful of candidates of their own.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party of Great Britain (purveyors of the Weekly Worker) and Workers Power (which underwent a split in its own ranks recently) were eager to sign up but had their applications rejected by TUSC's gatekeepers.

Fast-fading

In Scotland the recriminations from the bruising schism in the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) are still making themselves felt four years on. The breakaway Solidarity group (forlornly grouped around the fast-fading Tommy Sheridan) has agreed to stand its clutch of candidates under the TUSC umbrella. Sheridan's former allies in the original SSP have meanwhile refused to countenance any deal with TUSC, and will stand candidates of their own against the TUSC-Sheridan ticket.

The absurdity of the relentless factional infighting that continues to beset the British left should not be allowed to draw attention away from the far more serious reality of the left's role.

These insipid left-capitalist cabals that pose as 'radical alternatives' to the mainstream are nothing but obstacles to creating autonomous movements of resistance that can truly challenge the political and economic power of capital.

SNP: A view from Scotland

It emerged this week that a team of two scientists in Scotland aim to build equipment to study the eclipses of distant stars, after the first clear pictures of a non-solar eclipse were published. In the same week Gordon Brown announced the election for the 6th of May. While the priorities of the four main parties may seem more distant than the stellar investigations of some Scottish academics, we'll investigate the election as it's taking place in Scotland.

The governing Scottish National Party has announced plans alongside Plaid Cymru in Wales for joint demands on any hung parliament for funding. Since the nationalists came to power, the bloc grant that is allocated to the Scottish parliament to dole out for all devolved services and initiatives has seen large cuts.

Politically motivated to overbalance the nationalist government, this led the SNP administration (which is a minority government, after failing to reach a power-sharing agreement following its election) to broker the 'local government concordat'. To avoid councils becoming incensed at reduced central government funding, the deal was that money would no longer be ring-fenced. Councils could spend cash on anything. The results of this policy have been that the SNP has pushed or is pushing several policies through nationally which could be seen as progressive (reduced prescription charges, school meals etc), but in councils up and down the country core services such as schools and community provisions have seen savage cuts. The effect of a hung parliament may strengthen the hand of the government in the devolved administration.

The election comes against a backdrop of the implosion of the Labour-controlled council at one of the most powerful local authorities. Following on the coat-tails of Alistair Watson, the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport boss, who'd fiddled expenses to the tune of £100,000, Glasgow City Council leader Stephen Purcell resigned last month from politics, after a 'close personal friend' (aged 18) was found dead outside the city chambers from a suspected drug overdose. Purcell stepped down a few days earlier amid fears about his health, and it later emerged the man has a cocaine habit, and was visited by police officers regarding this, and his associations with millionaire drugs barons.

Alongside this tale of sleaze, the story of the left in this election however is likely to be little different. It has emerged that Tommy Sheridan, the disgraced former convener of the SSP, will be standing for the TUSC lash-up. Sheridan, who is facing a perjury trial beginning this September, is likely to win the most votes of any left candidate. He will also be lucky to have his deposit returned.

The SSP, which has fallen considerably upon harder times, decided, fractiously, to contest this general election, and later, to stand in ten seats. Whether the party's finances will allow it to mount any effective campaign is yet to be seen, and it certainly will not be winning any seats. The decision to stand in ten seats is understood to be the minimum number of seats needed for a party political broadcast on the television.



Plaid Cymru: What's up in Wales

Unlike the other parties, Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalists promise free face-painting to the voters

Under the catchy, 'Think different, think Plaid' slogan, Plaid Cymru (that's Party of Wales for our non Welsh speakers), have produced an interesting manifesto of what they would like to do if they get a share of power. Although they show no signs of surpassing the dizzy heights of the 2003 General Election when 14.3% of the Welsh vote gave them four Westminster seats, even retaining the three seats they already hold may prove crucial if we get a hung but sadly not hanged Parliament. Officially declaring an alliance with the Scottish National Party will produce a Celtic Block which may prove a key player if coalition deals are to be struck. So what are Plaid offering?

First, praise where praise is due; 'Plaid was the only major party

to oppose the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan from the beginning' their manifesto proudly points out (bit of a slap to the SNP there but never mind). They are committed to bringing the troops home immediately from Afghanistan. The trouble is none of the real 'major' parties agree and they will not be able to force it on a coalition government however desperate they are. The rest of the manifesto is little more than the lobbying of Westminster for extra funds for Wales without any coherent programme behind it. Here the rhetoric cannot cover the reality that Plaid Cymru's record in the Welsh National Assembly and local government is nothing more than a gaggle of self-seeking politicians using the cover of Welsh nationalism to get their snouts in the trough.

Getting active: Taking action

Practical ways to take back control over our lives

As we've seen, the parliamentary process is anything but democratic. There is no way of holding politicians to account for their actions once elected. The MPs expenses scandal might have highlighted the greed and corruption inside Westminster but we can still only vote for another set of politicians, equally as greedy and corrupt. The system remains intact and forever working against us.

In reality, effective social change doesn't come from career politicians defending their privileges, it comes about through the actions and activities of ordinary people fighting, usually against government power, for them. The fact that we work an eight hour day isn't because of the benevolence of the bosses (who would happily see us work every hour of the day) but through people having fought, often against massive repression, for it. Peoples right to a decent home, guaranteed welfare, rights at work have all come about despite, not because of, governments.

So what is it that anarchists offer as an alternative to voting? The basic idea that people have a greater understanding about their own needs, what's best for them, their community, and the methods needed to bring change about.

One such method is direct action - people addressing the issues that affect them and acting together to resolve them for the benefit of all. It is this that empowers people, gives people confidence, raises peoples expectations and aspirations, all the things governments try and take from us. There's nothing more threatening to those in power than ordinary people affecting change through direct democracy.

The rich and privileged are well prepared to defend their interests. We need to be organised and able to defend ours.

Workplace

The most obvious example of direct action is in the workplace with strikes, walkouts or work-to-rule, especially if they're not sanctioned by the union hierarchy. When the Lyndsey oil refinery workers staged a wildcat strike last year against management undercutting industry-agreed rates by employing cheaper foreign labour they drew support from thousands of workers at power stations and other construction sites around the country who all walked out in solidarity. This forced the management to



back down, allowing the workers to negotiate a better deal.

Equally as impressive was when the Visteon car parts manufacturers closed down their UK operation, sacking the entire workforce without notice and with no redundancy. Immediately the factories were occupied by the angry workers, (with the help of Haringey Solidarity Group, and other groups listed opposite) forcing the parent company Ford to capitulate and pay them what they owed. Without direct action those workers would not have received a penny.

Education

Parents in Lewisham in south London and in Glasgow took direct action when local authorities decided to close their children's

primary schools. They occupied the schools with the help of Solidarity Federation in Lewisham; local anarchist groups in Glasgow forced council leaders to reconsider the closures.

Equally, students at universities have begun a campaign of occupations against department cuts and job losses at universities across the UK. Most notably

students at Sussex re-occupied their campus as an act of defiance after threats of expulsion after their first occupation. Instead of accepting 'the inevitable' they were willing to fight for their education.

Housing

Another example of direct action is people refusing to accept unaffordable rents and house prices and squat instead. After WW2 returning soldiers found they were not being provided with housing by the government, and could not afford to rent,

so they decided to squat empty buildings, most impressively apartment blocks. This initiated a mass squatting movement with whole families taking over empty housing resulting in the government introducing the creation of large scale social housing.

On a smaller scale and more recently a local group in Tottenham, north London went to the council's housing department with a banner and leaflets to demand to speak to the case worker of a mother and her three children who were being evicted and had nowhere to live. Because of the actions of the group the council were forced to act on their legal obligations and house the family, instead of ignoring them, as they had done previously.

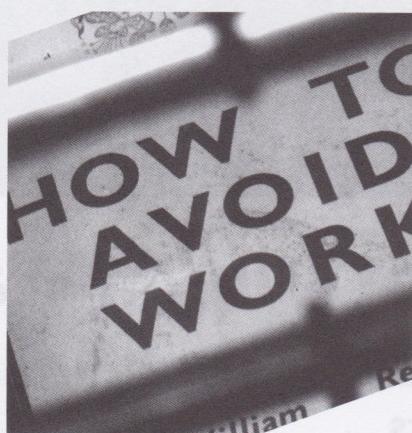
Poll Tax

And perhaps the most impressive and successful recent examples of direct action is the anti-poll tax campaign of the 1990s, where the unfair tax was opposed by millions of people. At its height some 17 million people were part of the non-payment campaign. Not only was this a mass campaign of non-payment with local groups supporting each other despite the threats of fines, prison, and evictions, there was also an extended solidarity network - local people could be called upon at a moment's notice to prevent bailiffs entering homes, taking people's possessions.

Legal support groups were set up to help people in court and stop them going to jail, groups disrupted council meetings and supported each other when they were threatened by the state, the very state we vote for at each election.

This was all done by ordinary people who decided to stand together against an unfair tax imposed upon them by an uncaring government.

It was this kind of direct action - rather than relying on political leaders to speak out on our behalf - that eventually brought down Thatcher and stopped the Poll Tax dead in its tracks.



Contacts List

Below is a list of useful contacts for groups, organisations, projects and campaigns who are all attempting to offer something practical beyond the constraints of formal institutions, to get things done and to make things happen. It is by no means an exhaustive list and we encourage people to investigate further in their area of interest and get involved.

National groups/federations

Anarchist Federation

afed.org.uk

Class War Federation

classwar-uk.blogspot.com

Liberty and Solidarity

www.libertyandsolidarity.org

Solidarity Federation

www.solfed.org.uk/

Radical Local Groups

Aberdeen Anarchists

aberdeenanarchists.wordpress.com

Cambridge Anarchists:

cambridgeanarchists.wordpress.com

Cardiff Anarchist Network

southwalesanarchists.org

Edinburgh Anarchists

edinburghanarchists.noflag.org.uk

Glasgow Anarchists

glasgowanarchists.wordpress.com

Lancaster Anarchist Group

myspace.com/lancaster_anarchist_group

Ipswich Anarchists

myspace.com/ipswich_anarchists

Preston Anarchists

myspace.com/prestonanarchists

Swindon Anarchist Group

swindonanarchistgroup.wordpress.com

Whitechapel Anarchist Group

whitechapelanarchistgroup.wordpress.com

Yorkshire Anarchist Group

yorkshireanarchist.wordpress.com

Community Action Groups

Action East End (London)

actioneastend.blogspot.com

Bath Activist Network

bathactivistnetwork.blogspot.com

Community Action Network

communityactionnetwork.wordpress.com

Cambridge Action Network

cambridgeaction.net

Hackney Solidarity Network

hackneysolidarity.info

Haringey Solidarity Group

haringey.org.uk

Hereford Solidarity League

herefordheckler.wordpress.com

Independent Working Class Association

iwca.info

Lewisham Community Action

[communityactionleisham.wordpress.com](http://communityactionlewisham.wordpress.com)

National Coalition for Independent Action

independentaction.net

Radical London

radicallondon.net

Reading Grassroots Action

rgacollective.org.uk

Workplace

Industrial Workers of the World
iww.org.uk

Education

Autonomous Students Network
autonomous-students.net
Autonomy and Solidarity
autonomyandsolidarity.blogspot.com
Defend Education in Lewisham
[defendededucationleisham.wordpress.com](http://defendededucationlewisham.wordpress.com)

Education Not For Sale

free-education.org.uk

Education Workers' Network

ewn.org.uk

Fight Cuts Campaign at Westminster University

fightcutsatuow.blogspot.com

Leeds University Against Cuts

leedsuniversityagainstcuts.wordpress.com

National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts

conventionagainstfeesandcuts.wordpress.com

Really Open University

reallyopenuniversity.org

Save London Met University

savelondonmetuni.blogspot.com

Save the University of Gloucester

s2.webstarts.com/saveuog

Save Our Schools - Glasgow

sosglasgow.wordpress.com

Save Our Schools - Sussex

defendsussex.wordpress.com

Queen Mary Autonomous Group

qmautonomy.wordpress.com

Health

Radical Health Workers

radicalhealthcareworkers.wordpress.com

UK Action Medics

actionmedics.org.uk

Association of Radical Midwives

radmid.demon.co.uk

Keep Our NHS Public

keepournsppublic.com

Save Our Blood Service

nbs-sos.blogspot.com

Housing

Advisory Service for Squatters

squatter.org.uk

Defend Council Housing

defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

Cornerstone Housing Co-operative

cornerstonehousing.org.uk

Radical Routes

radicalroutes.org.uk

Welfare

Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty

edinburghagainstpoverty.org.uk

Brighton Benefits Campaign

brightonbenefitscampaign.blogspot.com

Cambridge Unemployed Workers Union

cambridgeaction.net

Hackney Unemployed Workers

hackneyunemployedworkers.wordpress.com

London Coalition Against Poverty

lcap.org.uk

Ipswich Unemployed Action

intensiveactivity.wordpress.com

Newham Claimants Union

newhamclaimants.org.uk

Nottingham Claimants Action

afed.org.uk/nottingham/claimants

Tyneside Claimants Union

tynesideclaimantsunion.wordpress.com

Sunderland Welfare Action group

sunderlandwelfareaction.wordpress.com

Social Centres

1 in 12 Club

21-23 Albion Street, Bradford BD1 2LY

1in12.com

56a Infoshop

56 Crampton Street, London SE17 3AE

56a.org.uk

Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE)

17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh EH7 5HA

autonomous.org.uk

Common Place

23-25 Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ

thecommonplace.org.uk

Cowley Club

12 London Road, Brighton, East

Sussex BN1 4JA

cowleyclub.org.uk/

The Forest

3 Bristol Place, Edinburgh EH1 1EY

theforest.org.uk/index.php

Lancaster Resource Centre (LaRC)

The Basement, 78a Penny Street,

Lancaster LA1 1XN

eco-action.org/lancaster/

London Action Resource Centre (LARC)

62 Fieldgate Street, Whitechapel,

London E1 1ES

londonarc.org

Kebele

14 Robertson Road, Bristol BS5 6JY

kebelecoop.org/

Next To Nowhere

96 Bold Street, Liverpool, L1 4HY

liverpoolsocialcentre.org

Sumac Centre

245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX

veggies.org.uk/sumac/

Radical Bookshops/Libraries

Freedom Bookshop

Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High

Street, London E1 7QX

freedompress.org.uk

Frontline Books

73 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB

frontlinebooks.co.uk

Kate Sharpley Library

BM Hurricane, London WC1N 3XX

katesharpleylibrary.net

Housmans Bookshop

Kings Cross, 5 Caledonian Road,

London N1 9DX

housmans.com

News from Nowhere Bookshop

96 Bold Street, Liverpool L1 4HY

newsfromnowhere.org.uk

October Books

243 Portswood Road, Southampton SO17 2NG

octoberbooks.org

Sparrow's Nest radical library

St Ann's, Nottingham

thesparrowsnest.org.uk

Word Power Bookshop

43 West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8 9DB

word-power.co.uk

Voting for kakistocracy

Not that voting is a bad thing in itself. It's a simple, practical quick and fair way of making decisions. But democracy is much more than having the vote. Nowadays voting in elections to choose a government has been elevated to a moral stance. How often have we heard that people died for the right to vote? Or that we let down their memory if we don't vote?

But what is this democracy that's so important? When modern politicians say democratic they mean little more than something is "good". But there are good reasons that the idea became popular. Democracy is literally "rule by the people" as opposed to monarchy – rule by one person, or oligarchy – rule by a minority. There are other 'ocracies' such as kakistocracy (government by the worst people), but they all are subsets of these three.

Guillotine

Monarchs became unpopular because people got fed up with inbred royals lording it over them. Some quick work from the headsman's axe, guillotine or firing squad thinned out monarchies or at least reduced them to figureheads, albeit overpaid ones. This made rulers more cautious and led to the ruling class embracing the concept of democracy.

Looking at Britain today it's obvious we live in an oligarchy. Only a very small minority of people have any actual influence on how Britain is governed. On a global level this is even more true. This is covered in the present system by the fig leaf 'parliamentary', 'representative' or 'indirect' democracy.

Obviously the meaning of words change over time; hierarchy originally meant rule by priests, now it means a structure with

different ranks, but this is a clear case of calling something what it's not to make it sound better.

Why not leave it to the politicians?

Since ancient times the argument against democracy has been that surely the best qualified or most intelligent people should be in charge. Well, no one would disagree that expertise is useful; only a fool would prefer that their operation be carried out by the hospital porter rather than a qualified surgeon.

However, when it comes to making decisions about our own personal futures most people would not let anyone – however highly qualified – make choices for them about where they lived, what they eat or who they went out with. Politics falls into the same category of decision making.

There are no right answers that can be scientifically come to or proved correct, and as we all know often the cleverest of



Obviously people must have an adequate knowledge of political affairs to express opinions on them. That's not to say people should pass a test or qualification before being allowed to participate.

In fact it's the act of participating that educates people in the real sense. You can find out about democracy in books or by studying it at university but you will learn more about doing it by being active in your union branch or local residents association. There, real democracy can blossom as it is not a question of whose ideas get accepted but that good ideas will

As an old beardy said, everyone contributes to their ability and gets what they need

people can have the most foolish ideas. Politics is nothing more than making decisions about the way we live. When people say they aren't interested in politics – however understandable that is given how politicians behave – the result is giving up control of your own life to someone else.

Making democracy 'real'

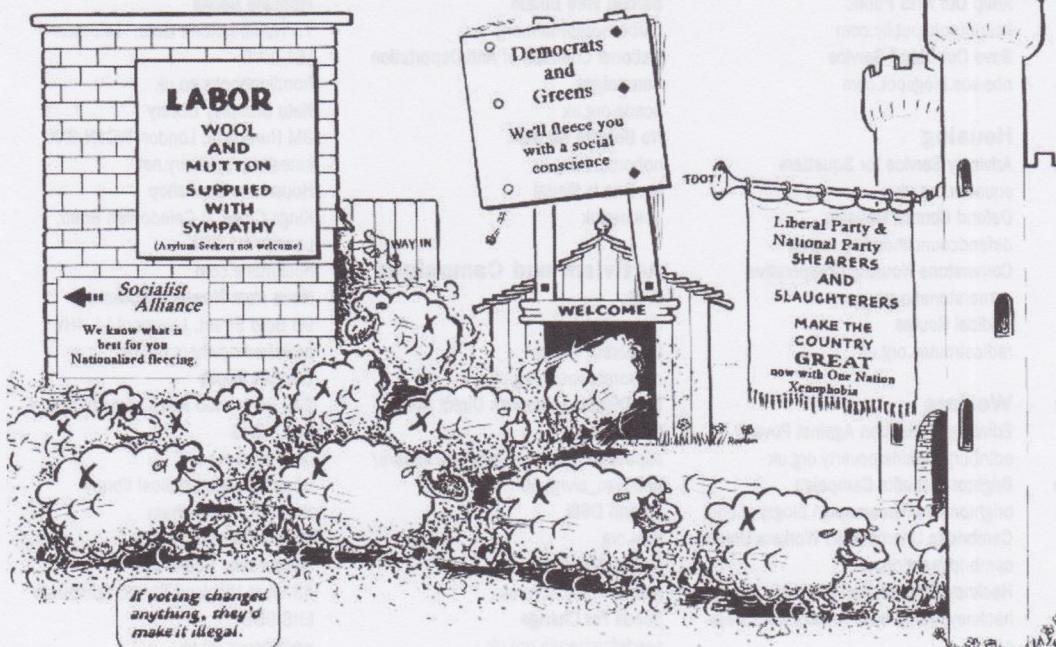
To effectively participate in a functioning democracy three things are needed: education, free time and equality.

prevail because people as a whole recognise that they are right.

Secondly you need to have the time necessary to take part. If you work all the time just to make ends meet you can't have a say. So society has to be reorganised so that everyone can take part in decision-making. MPs under our current system do nothing but politics (actually they also spend a lot of time fiddling the books, lazing about and accepting bungs but that's beside the point).

Last, we need equality. Ultimately the reason that politicians do not make decisions in the interest of the majority of their constituents is that they are much better off than most of them. They simply do not have the same experiences and concerns. Even if you have direct democracy but unequal wealth, the rich can get their own way whether by open bribery or by the social influence that wealth brings. Real democracy has to include control of the economy, how we work, what we produce and deciding where it's used.

As an old bearded once said, everyone contributes to their ability and gets what they need.



COMMENT

WHAT'S ON

APRIL

24th Campaign Against the Arms Trade gathering, your chance to meet supporters of CAAT and get involved, meet at The Anglican/Methodist Church Centre, Prewett Street, Redcliffe, Bristol BS1 6PB from 10.30am until 4.30pm, see caat.org.uk for details or call 020 7281 0297 or email rhiannon@caat.org.uk

29th London Education Workers Group public meeting – education, education, education or cuts, cuts, cuts? – at the Lucas Arms 245a Grays Inn Road, Kings Cross, London WC1X 8QZ at 7pm, contact londonewg@gmail.com

MAY

1st Mayday Meltdown, meet at 1pm and 2pm at various points around central London, see http://meltdown.uk.net/election/The_Plan_Mayday.html for details.

1st Mayday IWW benefit from 8pm until late at The Plough, 223 Easton Road, Bristol BS5 0EG, with DJ Batko, Rockin Gazza, The Directors, Barrio Kingdom, Spanner and more, £3/£4 donation.

8th Working Class Bookfair, from 11am until 5pm at Museum Vaults, 33 Silksworth Row, Sunderland, call 07931201901 or see <http://workingclassbookfair.vpweb.com>

10th Shut down Heckler & Koch, meet at 4pm, Easter Park, Lenton Lane, Nottingham NG7 2PX for demo and picket of UK headquarter of this US arms corporation, followed by meeting at 7pm at the Sumac Centre, see <http://nottasantimilitarism.wordpress.com/heckler-koch> for details.

12th to 15th Sheffield Temporary Autonomous Arts, free open access and DIY event to encourage community and self-expression, contact artandsoulcollective@hotmail.com or 07798 884131 or see randomartists.org or asksheffield.org for details.

15th Climate emergency overnight vigil, assemble outside St Martins in the Fields, Trafalgar Square, for midnight march down Whitehall to Old Palace Yard with 'art and empowerment' events through the night, for further details call 020 7833 9311, email info@campaigncc.org or see campaigncc.org

15th No Borders day of action for freedom of movement, meet at 2pm at Jaurès metro station, Line 2, 1 Avenue Jean-Jaurès, Arrondissement 10th, Paris, see <http://parisactionday.wordpress.com> for details.

22nd Sheffield's first anarchist bookfair from 10am until 4pm at the Corporation night club, Milton Street, Sheffield S1 4JU and followed by a social in the evening, for details see <http://yorks-afed.org>

29th London Zine Symposium, bringing together zine, small press, comic and radical writers at The Rag Factory, 16–18 Heneage Street, London E1 5LJ from 12 noon until 6pm, for further details see londonzinesymposium.org.uk

30th The far-right EDL are planning to march through Sheffield, see <http://yorks-afed.org> for details.

A sideways look

The last few elections have been marked by an ever-retreating participation in experience. Fewer posters in windows, fewer canvassers, less visibility unless you looked. People I'd known help Labour in 1997 or 2001 gradually stopped as it became harder for them to justify to themselves.

This one appears to be going a bit differently, and there are more posters for a start. Not many, but there are the big ones that look like the house is for sale, then you get closer and it tells you that the Lib Dems are winning here (except of course they're not). In terms of visibility, electoral politics has become an exclusively middle class pastime. I counted the posters in windows on a 20 minute walk. All Labour, Green or Lib Dem, all in larger than average houses, except for a single Labour poster in a flat.

That's not to say that there's no interest in the election amongst the working class. A conversation in a local pub had a young bloke who was asking about voting, and

was advised to vote in his own interests. Did he own property? Or work for a living? Well, vote for the side which supports the working man.

Amazingly, this was related to me by a Labour supporter, who'd perhaps missed the irony in the Party that has done so much to encourage buy-to-let and whose economic policies were so tied up to property speculation being his own. To say nothing of the public property speculation of the Blairs, Michael Meacher and other Labour MPs.

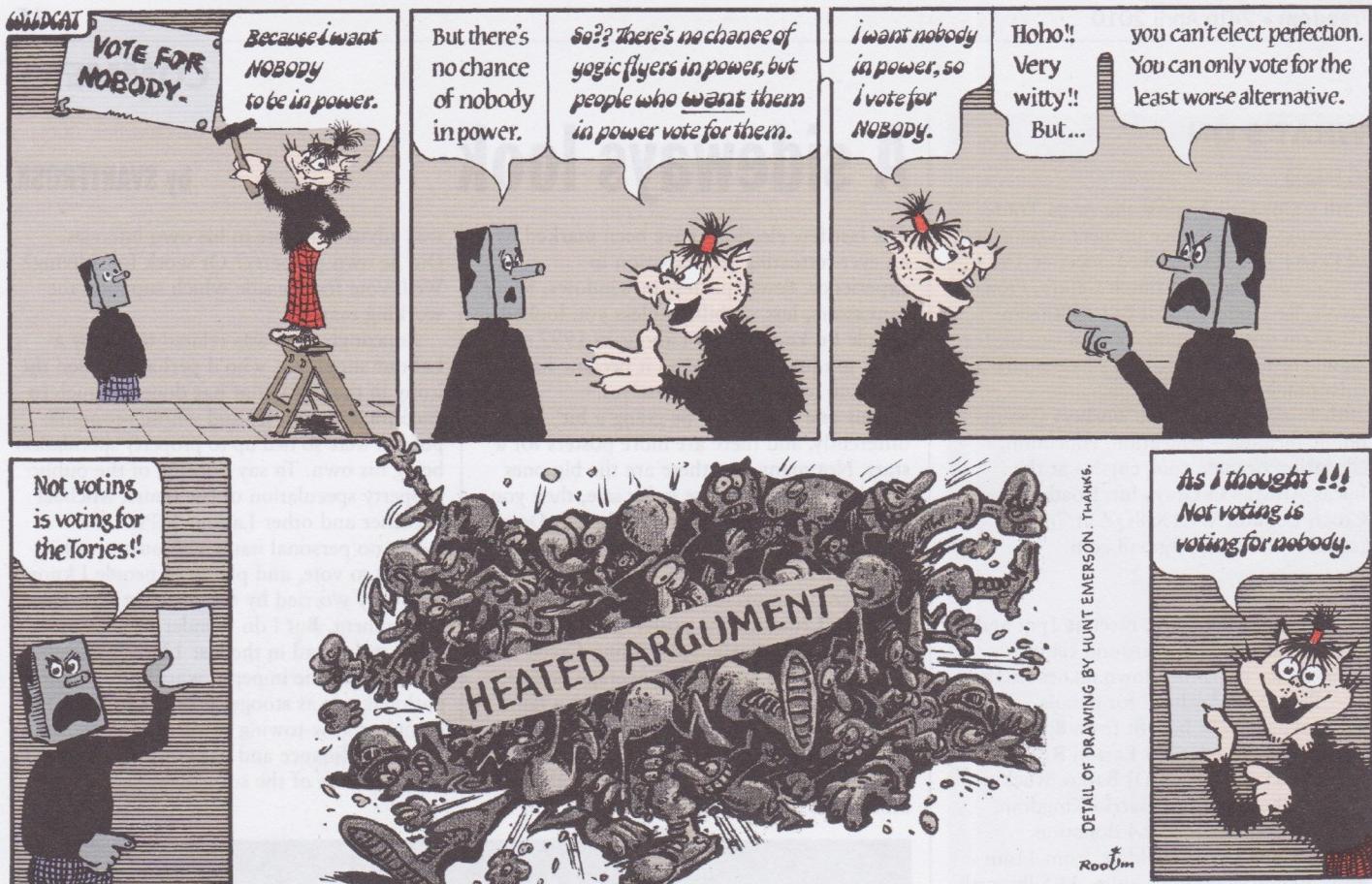
I've no personal issue with anyone who decides to vote, and plenty of people I know are really worried by the prospect of a Tory government. But I do wonder what people think we've had in the last 13 years? Even if we discount the imperial wars and the international role as stooge of Bush, we have the complete kow-towing towards big business, especially finance and banking and the headlong embrace of the surveillance state.

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QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes of the Scottish Socialist Party in their 2000 book *Imagine* "our programme will sooner or later sweep all before it at the ballot box" and "the forces of democratic socialism" will have "swept to power in a general election" in 2010 (page 146). In the 2007 election the SSP got 10% of its previous vote and lost all six of its MSPs.
2. Staffordshire South, where 37.2% of electors voted, after the election was delayed after the LibDem candidate died. As it took place after the result of the general election was known, hardly anyone bothered to vote and the incumbent Tory got back in.
3. Liverpool Riverside, where only 41% turned out to mark an X next to Labour in 2005.
4. Analyses election statistics. Poor sods.



Svartfrosk

◀◀ page 15

The good things Labour has done (and there are some – basic pensions are better, minimum wage is two-thirds of what it should be rather than what the bosses wanted, there has been investment in infrastructure) are all fairly bread and butter, the sort of thing you might get from anyone. The balance of power between workers and employers has, if anything, shifted even more to the employer. Striking is barely legal, and even a successful ballot can be overturned in the courts.

The big excuse used by many on the left for continuing to back Labour dates back to the 1901 Taff Vale Railway case, where a legal judgement against the Amalgamated

Society of Railway Servants awarded costs against the union. The response of the unions was to found the Labour Party and the judgement was overturned in 1906. It was argued that workers needed political representation to allow their unions to flex their industrial muscle.

Since 2005, the three biggest unions have given Labour nearly £25 million. Those on the left who have belatedly recognised that this is not good value for money are fighting amongst themselves to have this largesse redistributed to their particular party – one reason Unison has been running McCarthy-style witch hunts against Socialist Party activists. I believe it was Marx who observed that history repeats, the second time as farce. Can't his followers grasp that?

THE QUIZ

1. Who thought that he'd be forming a government in 2010?
2. What constituency officially holds the current record for lowest turnout in a general election?
3. Which constituency really had the lowest turnout in the 2005 election?
4. What does a psephologist do?

Answers on page 15

The Anarchist Quiz Book compiled by Martin Howard with illustrations by Paul Petard, is available at £5 (post free) from Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX or you can order online at freedompress.org.uk.



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FREEDOM fortnightly ISSN 0016 0504